

GUJRATI CUISINE

INTRODUCTION:

The traditional Gujarati food is primarily vegetarian and has a high nutritional value. Gujarati cuisine is in many ways unique from other culinary traditions of India. It is one of the few cultures where a majority of people are vegetarians. This vegetarianism may have originally sprung from religious ideologies and beliefs of the region. Gujarati cuisine has so much to offer and each dish has an absolutely different cooking style. Some of the dishes are stir fry, while others are boiled. Gujarati food is more often served on a silver platter. Gujaratis use a combination of different spices and flavour to cook their meals and this is what makes their food truly exotic.

Two movements led to a very high degree of vegetarianism in Gujarat. One was the strong Jain influence in the area even prior to the 6th century B.C. when the teachings of Mahavira had a powerful impact on the people. Numerous Jain scholars subsequently exerted a strong influence, like Hemachandra (11th century AD). Even King Kumarapala, a meat eater in his youth, was influenced later by Jainism. In the 12th century AD he issued edicts against the slaughter of animals, called *amarighoshanas*. Vaishnavism, which also enjoins abstinence from meat, received a strong impetus from the preachings of Vallabhacharya, who formed the Pushti-Marga sect in the 15th century AD. Today two-thirds of Gujarat is vegetarian, the highest proportion in any Indian state. The Jain population doesn't even include spices like onion and garlic. Yet their food is extremely delicious. This proves the culinary skills of the people of Gujarat.

Gujarati cuisine is a blend of exquisite flavours and textures. A wide range of foods are cooked in Gujarati homes, and a variety of typical traditional recipes come from different regions of Gujarat.

With so much variety in vegetarian food, the Indian British cookbook writer Madhur Jaffrey has termed Gujarati cuisine as "the haute cuisine of vegetarianism" in 'Flavours of India', one of her TV shows about Indian food.

REGIONAL COOKERY IN GUJRAT

Although the principal language of Gujarat is 'Gujarati' and other languages spoken are Hindi and English, Gujarat encompasses many languages and dialects throughout to its many regions, castes and traditions. People of *North Gujarat speak 'northern Gujarati'*, *Central Gujarat speaks 'Charotari'*, *Saurashtra speaks 'Kathiawadi'*, *South Gujarat speaks 'Surti'* and *Kutchh speaks 'Kutchi.'* Gujarat can be divided into four regions depending on the food habits:

- North Gujarat
- South Gujarat
- Saurashtra (Kathiawadi)
- Kutch (Kutchi)

North Gujarat is the **home of traditional Gujarati cuisine** with the Gujarati Thali being very popular. It is a dish consisting of rice, dal, sprouted beans, curry, vegetables, farsan, pickles, chutney and raita. North Gujarati food is **not very oily or spicy**. Farsans come in three varieties: *Pathara*, *Khaman Dhokla*, and *Khandvi*. Papads, chutneys and pickles accompany every meal and are preferred a lot. **This region is perhaps the healthiest and conventional in its cooking with oil and spices used in minimum.**

South Gujarat adds a **lot of green chillies** in their dishes. In some households, one of two chilli is just bitten at in between the meal to re - establish the spiciness. Very hot region and very hot cuisine is what could be said to describe the cuisine. It is very simple and the most common dishes are perhaps the same as that of North Gujarat with just **a lot of spices**. South Gujarat has plenty of rainfall, and this is the reason why there is **no shortage of green vegetables and fruit**. Fruits and fresh vegetables are also common in Surati food as a result. It also must be asserted that these foods prepared are common at festive occasions, and even though there are no extensive preparations. Among the popular items here at festival times are **Oondhiyu and Paunk**. These people also have a sweet tooth and one can see a lot of sweeteries and bakeries locally. Products like **Nankhatias and Gharis** are very popular in this region. South Gujaratis eat simple food with a lot of life in it in the form of green chillies.

Saurashtra (Kathiawari): A popularity of this region is **Dhebra**. It is made with wheat flour, spinach, green chillies, a pint of yoghurt, salt and sugar to taste. It is eaten with a specially prepared hot and sweet mango pickle. The Kathiawari speciality with respect to spices is called **Methi masala** (Fenugreek is dried and ground with red chillies and salt). This is used to flavour curries and other dishes. In Kathiawad, it quite surprising to learn that Saurashtra in spite of its dry earth has **millet, peanuts, sugarcane, wheat, and sesame**. In Saurashtra during the harsh cold winter bhakris, a type of thick rotis, made from wheat flour, garlic, onion, buttermilk and a lot of spices is made. It keeps the body warm. **Phafda**, an omum flavoured assorted flour puri is another Kathiawari favourite. **Pulses** dominate Kathiawari food and sweetmeats made of jaggery. They also eat a lot of **peanut and til cookies**. This region has a delicious **variety of pickles**.

Kutchi cuisine is also very simple. Both Kutch and Kathiawar use **a lot of red chillies** in their dishes. The main dish of this region is **Khichdi**. It is eaten with Kadhi - a spicy gravy made of yoghurt. Khaman Dhokla, Doodhpak and Shrikhand (eaten with hot fluffy puris) are part of the everyday meal.

FEATURES OF GUJRATI CUISINE

- A typical Gujarati meal consists of Indian Breads made from **millets** – the staple of Gujarat. Roti itself is prepared in a number of variations from the petal soft phulkas to the bone-dry khakra.
- Certain ingredients like yogurt, buttermilk, coconut, groundnut, sesame seeds, limejuice, sugar, jaggery etc. are very common in Gujarati food. *The unique feature of Gujarati food is that a touch of **sugar** goes into most Gujarati spicing.*
- The cuisine changes with the seasonal availability of vegetables. An assorted combination of green leafy vegetables, seasonal healthy vegetables, with a delectable collection of spices makes it very palatable and tasty.
- The spices used also change depending on the season. Garam Masala and its constituent spices are used less in summer.
- Regular fasting, with diets limited to milk and dried fruits, and nuts, are commonplace. Goodness of milk, yoghurt, buttermilk, coconuts, groundnuts and various other nuts make this meal rich in proteins even with the absence of meat and eggs.
- Papads include the *kheechara*, which contains wheat, rice, and bajra flours, and is neither fried nor baked, but steamed.

- Raithas are made from curd and a combination of vegetables, nuts, dried fruits and chutneys.
- Pickles include the distinctive *athanu*, *goondas* and *chanduo* with its sweet-sour flavor, tempered with cardamom and cloves.
- Sweets (desserts) made from such ingredients as local sugar cane, jaggery (a solid made from unrefined cane sugar), milk, almonds, and pistachios were originally served at weddings and family occasions as an instant energy booster for relations travelling long distances to attend.
- Many Gujarati dishes are distinctively sweet, salty, and spicy at the same time. The use of jiggery, kokum, lime and tamarind is in plenty. They can also be very oily.
- Gujarati snacks are also known as FARSAN. The Farsan consists of many delicacies like *Daal Dhokli*, *Dhokla*, *Fafda*, *Farsi Falafel*, *Ganthia*, *Hahdwoh*, *Kachori*, *Khakhra*, *Khaman*, *Khaman Dhokla*, *Khandvi*, *Khichu*, *Lilva Kachori*, *Muthia*, *Sev Khamani* etc
- Gujaratis in general from all the four regions, namely, North Gujrat, South Gujrat, Saurashtra (Kathiawadi) and Kutch (Kutchi) eat a simple everyday meal which is daal, rice, rotli, shaak. During festive days, additional and more varieties of shaak, sweet dishes and Farsan is prepared.
- There is a specific dietary rule followed in just this foursome combination. For example, if kadhi is served, then a daal or vaal will also be included. The sweet dish accompanying kadhi will likely be milk or yogurt-based, like doodhpak or shrikhand. In such a meal raita would not be served. Festive meals which serve daal will typically have a wheat-based sweet dish like lapsi or ladu as the sweet accompaniment.
- Seasoning of food is thereby given great importance with mustard, fenugreek, thyme and asafoetida used both for flavour and as digestive aids.
- The Parsi and Bohri Muslim community has a distinctive cuisine style in Gujrat with an identity of their own.

DESIGNING A GUJRATI MEAL:

Staples include homemade pickles, Khichdi (rice and lentil or rice and mung bean daal), and chhaas (buttermilk). Main dishes are based on steamed vegetables and daals that are added to a *vaghaar*, which is a mixture of spices sterilized in hot oil that varies depending on the main ingredient. Salt, sugar, lemon, lime, and tomato are used frequently to prevent dehydration in an area where temperatures reach 50C (120 deg F) under the shade. It is common to add a little sugar or jaggery to some of the sabzi/shaak and daal. The sweet flavour of the dishes is believed to neutralize the slightly salty taste of the water.

The traditional Gujarati thali mostly encompasses rotli, dal or kadhi, sabzi also known as shaak and rice. People in Gujarat eat one or the other type of curry along with rice and roti in almost every meal Gujarati dishes usually have a very subtle taste that makes it truly distinct from other Indian cuisines. Lot of emphasis is laid on maintaining hygiene while cooking. Most of the Gujarati dishes are sweet, while others have a quite larger concentration of sugar as compared to salt and spices. Sometimes, jaggery is used as an alternative to sugar.

Gujarati menu:

A typical Gujarati menu is globally known as the “Gujarati thali”. It is a treat for any food lover which is a very widely spread menu. But here is a typical menu very commonly eaten at homes on daily basis:

- *Bajri no rotlo*
- *Moongdal khichdi*
- *Oondhiyu with sev*
- *Bhareli bhindi*
- *Khaman*
- *Choonda*
- *Kadhi*
- *Ghaari*

EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENT IN GUJRATI CUISINE:

- One or two deep boiling vessels for boiling rice and other foods. Rice need only be boiled in one utensil. The taste of the rice when you boil it next will not be the same if one boil anything else in it, as oily residue from curries or other foods will be left in the rice utensil. Having to remove oily residue is not a problem, it is the taste that could change because of the residue that is off greater concern.
- Boiling vessels are necessary for lentils and pulses.
- Different pans are required for frying. This is important because of the fact that a lot of things need to be fried in Gujarati cuisine, the masalas and even some of the lentils and vegetables too.
- Strainers, drainers and stirring spoons are also required. Strainer spoons are handy, as they are porous, and help in separating solid portions of gravies.
- In addition to the above, a tawa is very important for frying chapatti and roti of different kinds.

PREPARATION METHODS FOR GUJRATI CUISINE

Cooking methods and methods of preparation in Gujarati cuisine are vital in order to influence the end result of a Gujarati dish. Gujarati cooking does not utilize meats. Chicken and fish too are hardly used. Gujarati cuisine is mostly a vegetarian cuisine as a result. Nevertheless it is a delightful cuisine and is one in which you get to cook several kinds of lentils, pulses and vegetables. Indeed, with these basic food substances, Gujarati cuisine is said to be a healthy and simple one.

Based on this background, the following can be noticed regarding the preparation methods:

- The processes such as marinating or seasoning meats are not required at all.
- Pre - soaking of lentils, pulses and rice is common in order to soften the grains.
- Grinding of spices is commonly carried out in Gujarati cuisine. Prepared spices are normally not used, as these dishes seem to look and taste better with ground spices.

Oil is also not used much. Spice and oil are both kept at a minimum in Gujarati cuisine. Therefore, it can be said that this cuisine is healthy to follow.

- Boiling of lentils and vegetables are a very common feature.
- Frying – both shallow and deep are also commonly practiced for different items.
- The basic skill required is to use the correct amount of oil and spice that Gujarati cuisine tastes best with.

DESCRIPTION OF SOME OF THE GUJRATI DISHES

Rice:

Khichdi: Also known as kitcheri, this dish is a precursor to kedgerie, a dish which was popular among the British in India. Khichdis are made with various lentils and this gives it the variety. It is usually eaten with curd, pickle and papads. The Gujarati khichadi is prepared simply by mixing arhar or moong dal with rice.

Bohri biriyani: Bohris belong to the Bohri community of Gujarat. A delicately flavoured rice preparation cooked on dum, along with meat, apricots, potatoes and spices.

Breads:

- Methi Thepla: Indian bread prepared from a dough made from whole wheat flour, bajra, besan, methi, oil. It is rolled thin and then dry – baked.
- Bhakhri: A bread about 4 inch in diameter, made from a dough of coarse atta, oil, salt – dry baked and smeared with ghee.
- Rotli: In Gujarat the chapati is called a 'rotli' and can be as thin as tissue paper.
- Khakra: This crispy, crunchy flatbread is from Gujarat in western India. Khakra is a popular vegetarian roasted Gujarati Indian thin cracker bread or snack item made from mat bean (moth bean or Turkish gram) and wheat flour and oil.
- Dhebra: It is made with wheat flour, spinach, green chillies, a pint of yoghurt, salt and sugar to taste. It is eaten with a specially prepared hot and sweet mango pickle.
- Puran Poli (Also known as Vedmi): Whole wheat bread filled with sweet moong dal filling usually made for special occasions.

Nasto and Farsan

Nasto and Farsan are fried items. These are distinctive and are not eaten together.

Nasto are items of many types that can be kept for long in air-tight tins and can be easily transported. These are mainly made of besan eg. The fafda, sev and ganthia. The chevda consists of beaten rice that has been fried to crispness and mixed with salt, spices, groundnuts, almonds and raisins. A mix of all the above, and in fact of anything crunchy.

Farsan : is a collective term used for a type of snacks Gujarati cuisine, from the Indian state of Gujarat. Some are fried items which are then dried and can be stored, others fresh, fried or steamed.

Farsan:

- Dhokla: Batter made from chana dal, besan, spices, fermented, steamed and then tempered. It is served with a chutney (tamarind). There are several types of Dhokla such as Khatta dhokla, green peas dhokla, Cheese dhokla, Toor dal dhokla etc. (Khaman is a similar gram flour-based food that is sometimes confused with dhokla. Whereas dhokla is made with rice and chickpeas, khaman is made from chickpeas only. It is generally lighter in color and softer than dhokla.)
- Khandvi : Small rolled crepes made with a cooked batter of besan, curd, ginger, green chillies and then tempered, served with a chutney.
- Ragda: garnished fried potato patties
- Batata vada: It consists of a potato mash patty coated with chick pea flour, then deep-fried and served hot with savory condiments called chutney. The vada is a sphere, around two or three inches in diameter.
- Patra: Taro Leaves, coated with Gram Flour, rolled and steamed. Sometimes, the steamed roll is sliced and stir-fried with Mustard Seeds and Grated Coconut.
- Muthia: Steamed dumpling made of Gram Flour, Fenugreek, Salt, Turmeric, and Cayenne Pepper. The steamed dumpling can also be stir fried with Mustard Seed.
- Kachori: A deep fried dumpling made of flour and filled with a stuffing of Yellow Moong Dal, Black Pepper, Cayenne Pepper, and Ginger.
- Samosa
- Sev Khamani: Khaman topped with crispy, fried Gram Flour.
- Ganthiya
- Farsan Mixture

Miscellaneous:

- Oondhiyu: A mixed vegetable casserole that is traditionally cooked upside down underground in earthen pots fired from above. This dish is usually made of the vegetables that are available on the South Gujarat coastline during the winter season, including (amongst others) green beans, unripe banana, muthia, and purple yam. These are cooked in a spicy curry that sometimes includes coconut. Surti Oondhiyu is a variant that is served with puri at weddings and banquets. Again it is a mixed vegetable preparation, made with red lentils and seasoned with spices, grated coconut, and palm sugar in a mild sauce. It is garnished with chopped peanuts and toasted grated coconut, and served with rice.
- Patrani Machchi: Fish covered with a flavoured spiced coconut chutney, wrapped in singed banana leaves and then steamed.
- Salli Jardalu murgh: Chicken cooked in a spicy gravy with apricot and garnished with straw potatoes.
- Dhansak: A combination of dals, vegetables and meat pieces cooked in spices and served with a brown rice – A Parsi community speciality.
- Batata – nu – saag:
- Kadhi: Gravy prepared with sour curd and besan, simmered and tempered.

Desserts:

- Mohan Thal: Prepared out of besan, ghee, milk and sugar.
- Laganu custard: A Parsi community wedding speciality. To prepare this the milk is boiled along with sugar until it is reduced to half. Powdered nutmeg is added for flavour and when the mixture is cool enough, eggs are beaten into it along with dry fruits. This is then baked in a moderate oven, until the top surface is golden brown and the custard is firm.
- Kharak halwa: This is a famous dessert of the Bohri community in Gujarat. This dessert is a halwa made from a paste of dates that are roasted in ghee and cooked with milk and sugar. This is a very heavy dessert and is consumed in small quantities.
- Shrikhand: It is a yoghurt based dessert in which hung yoghurt and powdered sugar is taken in a deep bowl and then mixed thoroughly. Cardamom powder and saffron is added to it for flavour. It is then strained through muslin cloth and then stored in earthenware container which further absorbs the moisture and converts it into a thick creamy texture. It is normally served chilled with poori.
- Laapsi: A Gujarati dessert (broken wheat pudding) in which cracked wheat is cooked in water, sweetened with sugar flavoured with cardamom. It is garnished with shaves of almonds and pistachio.
- Dhoodpak: Thickened milk in which rice is cooked, sweetened with sugar, flavoured with saffron and cardamom powder served with various nuts (blanched almonds sliced, pistachio, Charoli etc) and raisins.
- Shakkarpara: It is a crispy Indian sweet traditionally made during Holi. It is a deep fat fried sweetened dough, normally cut into diamond shape.
- Halvasan: A dessert popular in the Khambhat region in which germinated wheat is cooked in milk, flavoured with saffron, cardamom and nutmeg, and then set on a ghee smeared plate from which it is served cut into various shapes garnished with nuts.
- Basundi: Basundi is an Indian dessert mostly in Bihar, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka. It is a sweetened dense milk made by boiling milk on low heat until the milk is reduced by half.